

December 13th Candlelight Vigil

On Sunday, December 13th, Insure Tennessee advocates across the state will hold a candlelight vigil to bring attention to the plight of those who are living in the gap. During this holiday season, let us think of those who have been left to fall in the cracks, and of those who have been ignored in our society. And let's make sure that our neighbors, our communities, and our legislators are thinking about them, too.

In order to make this a powerful, statewide movement, we need your support.

This guide will help you build your own candlelight vigil in your community. Please remember that this is just a guide – you know your community best, and you know what will be most effective, so let your creativity and passion loose!

Goal of the Vigil: on December 13th, gather community members to hold a candlelight vigil to pray for those who are in the coverage gap.

Components of a Successful Vigil: a successful vigil will look different in every community, but here are some general goals to work towards:

- Gather at least 10 people together for the vigil. This doesn't have to be huge to be successful – the fact that it is happening statewide is newsworthy in itself. Depending on the size of your community, aim for 20-30 people, but know that even having 10 there is fantastic. Ideas for spreading the word are below.
- Have someone there who is comfortable with leading prayers. This could be a clergy, a congregational leader, or anyone who is comfortable with preparing a few prayers for the vigil. It could be you! If you'd like help preparing a prayer, contact Rev. Merrilee Wineinger at merrilee.wineinger@tnumc.com.
- Have someone there who is comfortable with talking about Insure Tennessee. Have someone who is prepared to speak about why Insure Tennessee is a moral issue, and why we need to stand up for our neighbors in need. (Hint: this is probably you!) Also, if you know someone who is in the gap, invite them to speak about their own experience if they would like to.
- Create an agenda that works for you. A sample agenda is below, but don't feel tied to it. The important thing is just to make sure that you have a plan on how you will spend the time.
- Just go for it! If you have the passion, the drive, and the confidence, you will create a successful prayer vigil. Remember that you are doing this to stand with 280,000 Tennesseans that do not have access to basic health care, for the rural communities who have already lost their hospitals and for the rural communities that are facing the same fate, and for the 15,000 jobs that our neighbors need that this could bring to the state. You are on the right side of history, and let that faith and knowledge carry you forward, and you will have a successful prayer vigil.

Details to Iron Out

There are a few details to consider before your prayer vigil. Each vigil will look a little different, so do what is best for your own community.

- **Location, location, location.** There is no one perfect place to have your prayer vigil. You could have it outside one of your local hospitals to show how important it is for the health care system, you could have it at your local court house or town hall to show that this is an issue that leaders need to get behind, or you could do it in front of the office of your elected official to show that they need to take action and their constituents support Insure Tennessee. *Be sure to find out if you need permission to gather at your chosen place!*
- **Candles, lights, and glow sticks, oh my!** Make the decision of what you would like to have as your light of choice. Since the vigil will most likely be outside, be aware that whether will play a big role in this – and a windy, wet day might make it hard for flames. You can ask people to bring candles, but have a back-up supply of battery-operated candles. Ask your church if they have some you can borrow, or go to a local dollar store and buy a handful – send TJC your receipt at 301 Charlotte Ave, Nashville, TN 37201 to get a reimbursement for this purchase if you need it.
- **Luminaries for Nashville.** On January 11th, the day before the legislative session begins, we are going to have luminaries (white paper bags with candles/lights inside of them) on the steps of the capital that represent people who are in the gap. Help this effort by bringing white paper bags to your vigil, and ask people to write their names on them, names of people they know who are in the gap (only if they have permission!), or sentences about why they support Insure Tennessee. You can use these as luminaries at your vigil or not, but either way, send them to TJC at the end so we can use them in Nashville! Mail them to 301 Charlotte Ave, Nashville, TN, 37201.
- **Speakers and an agenda.** Who will speak at the prayer vigil? What will your agenda look like? What time will it be, and how long will it go? We recommend having it in the early evening, when it is dark out, but not too late. Ideally, you could have clergy there to lead songs and prayer, but a member of the clergy is by no means necessary.
- **Petitions and handouts.** Bring petitions for people to sign, and handouts with more information about Insure Tennessee. Find these resources at www.tnjustice.org/candlelight-vigils.
- **Interdenominational events.** Insure Tennessee is supported by many different faiths and denominations. As you are planning, reach out to people in other faith communities to ask them to join in the planning, or to speak. The more communities of faith that are represented, the better!
- **Photos at the event.** Be sure to take plenty of pictures at the event so you can send them to the press if they aren't able to make it. Post them on Facebook if you have one, on other social media outlets, and send them to Katie at kalexander@tnjustice.org.

Ideas for Outreach About the Vigil

Once you've made the decision to host a prayer vigil, get started on reaching out to your community to get people there! Remember that this doesn't have to be huge to be successful – even having 10 people there should be considered a success. But aim for having 20-30 people there, because the more, the merrier! Here are some ideas for outreach:

- **Engage a core group of people to help you.** Ask a few people to help you host it and plan it, so that you don't have to do everything by yourself. To find out if there are other people in your community who have been involved with Insure Tennessee, email Katie Alexander at kalexander@tnjustice.org.
- **Create a flyer to spread the word.** Email Katie if you would like a sample flyer that you can edit.
- **Start with family, friends, coworkers, your church, and other groups you are involved in.** You'd be surprised at how many people you know! Call those who you are closest to, and ask them to come to the prayer vigil and to help spread the word, and follow up with an email with the flyer. Post the flyer at your work. Ask your pastor if you can put it in the church bulletin, or if he or she will speak about it from the pulpit. Tell your book club about it, and ask them all to come together. Talk to everyone that you know about it, and try to make personal connections as much as you can. And when you tell people about it, ask them to tell 5 friends of their own.
- **Ask friends in other churches to spread the word to their congregation.** Reach out to friends that attend other churches, and ask them if they can talk to their pastor about it to put it in their bulletin.
- **Send out the flyer to your email list.** Once you've made all the personal connections you can, start sending out emails about it.
- **Create a Facebook event.** This is a great way to get other people engaged that are outside your direct circle. If you have a Facebook, make an event, and invite all of your friends. Be sure to make it a public event, so others can post it on their walls.
- **Print out the flyer and post it around town.** Put it up in your coffee shop, on lamp posts, bring it to businesses (especially faith-centered businesses and organizations), and give a stack of 20 to your friends to do the same. If you need help paying for the printing costs, please contact Katie.
- **Put it on the TJC Calendar so TJC can direct people to your vigil.** Just fill out the information at <https://www.tnjustice.org/calendar/community/add>.
- **Send a press advisory to TJC so we can send it to local press.** Go to www.tnjustice.org/candlelight-vigils for a sample press release. If you fill it out and send it to us, we can send it out to the press – but if you have local connections with the press and with radio stations, you should send it out as well!

Check List

Want to make sure you didn't forget anything? Go through this checklist!

- Pick a location and find out if you need permission at that location
- Go to for a sample press release: fill out your information, and send it to Katie at TJC (kalexander@tnjustice.org)
- Put it on the TJC calendar at:
<https://www.tnjustice.org/calendar/community/add>
- Create a flyer
- Ask a few friends to really commit time to helping you
- Find a congregational leader or a member of the clergy to help you with the prayers
- Spread the word:
 - Call friends and family
 - Post a flyer at work
 - Post flyers around town
 - Create a Facebook event
 - Email all your contacts, and ask them to email their contacts
 - Reach out to local churches and ask them to put something in their bulletin
- Create an agenda
- Get white paper bags for people to write on for luminaries in Nashville
- Print out petitions and handouts (go to www.tnjustice.org/action).
- At the event, take pictures and post them on Facebook
- After the event, send Katie copies of the petitions, and photos of the event.

Sample Agenda

5:00-5:15: Welcome and introduction to Insure Tennessee. Begin the vigil by welcoming people, thanking them for coming out, and telling them a little bit about why this issue is so important. Some important points to hit on:

- Governor Haslam introduced Insure Tennessee a year ago, and our legislators will have another opportunity this year to vote on it.
- Insure Tennessee would help 280,000 of our neighbors who are living without health care coverage. These are our friends, people who work in the service industry, people who have worked their whole lives, but they are being ignored by society.
- Insure Tennessee is vital for our rural communities, whose hospitals are closing or at risk of closing. When a community's only hospital closes, it is devastating for those who need the hospital, for those who worked in the hospital, and for other businesses that relied on that hospital for their business.
- This is a moral issue. This is about caring for the least of these, about ensuring that every person has access to basic health care coverage.

5:15-5:20: Procession of light. Have the congregation light candles to represent not only their faith as a light in dark times but also the presence of those who are living in the coverage gap.

5:20-5:30: Songs. Lead the group in a few songs to build energy and support. These could be "We Shall Overcome," "God of Every Nation," "God, How Can We Comprehend?" or any others that resonate with you.

5:30-5:35: Scripture. Read a passage from the Bible that relates to health care for our neighbors. Please remember that if this is an interdenominational event, that you chose a passage from a book of faith that can resonate with everyone. You may want to have passages from the Bible, the Torah, and the Koran. For help choosing a Bible passage, please contact Merrilee at merrilee.wineinger@tnumc.com, or email Katie at kalexander@tnjustice.org for a copy of the Clergy Toolkit.

5:35-5:50: Reflection. Invite a speaker – a community leader or local pastor – to reflect on the readings. The reflection should focus on the question of whether these readings are evidence of a theological imperative that calls our faith into action in regard to health care coverage for our neighbors.

5:50-6:05: Prayers. One person may lead the prayers, or you may invite several people to lead them according to their traditions.

6:05-6:15: Closing. Close your vigil with a simple prayer that reiterates the vital need for Insure Tennessee. Pass around a petition for people to sign, and pass around information about Insure Tennessee.